

DRAFT April 6, 2011
Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

Proposed City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan Environmental Element policy updates for the 2011 Annual Update

Introduction

The Seattle Urban Forestry Commission proposes to update policies of the City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan's Environmental Element to better reflect and be consistent with the City's Urban Forestry Management Plan and current canopy management approach. The following updates are suggested, with discussions following.

Policy Update Recommendations

E9.5

Strive to achieve no net loss of tree canopy coverage starting in 2008, and strive to increase tree canopy ~~coverage by 1 percent per year~~ up to a total of 40 percent, to reduce storm runoff, absorb air pollutants, reduce noise, stabilize soil, provide habitat, and mitigate the heat island effect of developed areas.

E23

Strive to achieve no net loss of tree canopy coverage starting in 2008, and strive to increase tree canopy ~~coverage by 1 percent per year~~ up to a total of 40 percent, to reduce storm runoff, absorb air pollutants, reduce noise, stabilize soil, provide habitat, and mitigate the heat island effect of developed areas.

Discussion:

The Commission believes that by removing the "1 percent per year" from this policy statement, it would better reflect its intent while also bringing into compliance the City's existing Urban Forestry Management Plan (UFMP). One percent per year is a quantitative measure of canopy that cannot be accurately measured – one percent can easily be a margin of error in a citywide canopy assessment. Furthermore, it would require that the City commit resource to assess the canopy every year to ensure compliance with this policy. Annual assessments are not the approach to canopy preservation and growth as set forward in the City's UFMP, which has targeted canopy growth goals by City zone through 2037.

The 40 percent canopy goal the City has committed to is laudable, and given the information we have today, should remain as is unless future canopy assessments suggest otherwise. Currently, the UFMP identifies a 30 percent canopy goal by 2037 which takes into account OSE staff's position that 30 percent is a *realistic* goal for this period of time. As the City commits resources to grow its canopy in following years, it is our sincere hope that a 40 percent goal will

be achieved. Until then, the recommended change in policy language will bring the UFMP into compliance with these policies, setting the stage for what we hope will be formal Council adoption of the UFMP.

E24

| Update the 2000 tree canopy inventory in the Urban Forest Management Plan at least every 10 years to measure progress toward the goal of increased canopy coverage.

Discussion:

The Commission believes that by adding “at least” to this policy statement, the policy is clarified and strengthened – one could read this as updating the canopy only every 10 years. Current management practices assess the canopy much more frequently (200x, 200x, id the years), but this additional language will ensure a higher standard for canopy updates and give City staff clearer direction on the intent of the policy.

Discussion Question for the SUFC:

- How do we engage Council and provide them with sufficient information so that they can support these updates in a potentially challenging political climate during the annual update?
- Should we consider making a recommendation for these changes to be undertaken as part of the 2013 full Comp Plan update? Discuss the benefits of each and the importance of a collaborative strategy with the Inter Departmental Team on urban forestry matters.

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